

THE OFFICIAL HISTORY
BY DAVE LING

SPECIAL EDITION

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS
WITH BAND INSIDERS

MUSIC LEGENDS



THE INSIDE STORY OF ROCK'S GREATEST NAMES



Uriah Heep

Firefly to Conquest

URIAH HEEP IN THE STUDIO AND ON THE ROAD 1976-1980





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Contents

Introduction..... 5

Chapter 1

A New Beginning..... 7

Chapter 2

The Conquest Experiment..... 41



Introduction

It never ceases to amaze me how this music has retained a hold over so many of us for so long. It is now over fifty years since the young men collectively known as Uriah Heep first stepped into a recording studio and here we are still discussing, dissecting and enjoying the fruits of their labours.

Despite numerous attempts over the years I've never managed to encapsulate just what makes this music so special. I know it's the best there is, I know it's got something to do with the magical, dramatic 'gothic' quality of the Uriah Heep sound, but the exact words to express that enchanting quality have always eluded me. So this time round it's time to hand things over to our panel of Heep 'superfans' and see if collectively they can get nearer to explaining the source of the enduring power of Heep music.

Here, we join Heep on their rock journey as they sought to recover from the departure of their frontman David Byron in July 1976. The

band had already left an incredible legacy of classic albums defined by their unforgettably gothic and unique sound. Now they were on the hunt for a new frontman and a new direction as they looked to the future, and they hoped, to greatness.

In addition to the painstakingly researched and expertly compiled excerpts from *Wizards and Demons – The Uriah Heep Story* by Dave Ling, we have an in-depth track-by-track analysis of each Heep studio album from 1977's *Firefly* to 1980's *Conquest*.

Reviewing for us here you will find the most knowledgeable gathering of Heep aficionados ever assembled. This super concentrated mass of Heep memory and brain power is the musical equivalent of a black hole in space sucking in every scrap of Heep-related wisdom. Here you will find a gravitational pull so strong that no single musical detail or piece of Heep trivia has ever managed to escape their clutches.

We hope you enjoy reading this as much as we enjoyed bringing it all together here.

Bob Carruthers

Executive Producer



Chapter 1

A New Beginning

Finding a replacement for the unique talents of David Byron proved to be every bit as difficult as Deep Purple had feared. Ex-Deep Purple frontman David Coverdale, Ian Hunter of Mott the Hoople fame and even Free/Bad Company singer Paul Rodgers all took spells at the Heep microphone without any overwhelming portents of success. All three auditioned for the band, but none seemed to be what they were looking for. Former Heavy Metal Kids singer Gary Holton, who'd been sacked by his own band on the same night as Byron, was also linked with the vacancy.

'The main problem was that the first couple of people that we thought we were going to have as replacements really weren't as good as we expected them to be,' admits Ken. 'So we realised all of a

sudden that it was going to be a long, hard grind. We didn't actually audition that many people. However, I do remember jamming with Mr Coverdale, which was a horrendous mismatch. We had just fired a drunken singer with a German wife and in walked David Coverdale with his German girlfriend and a bottle of Jack Daniel's in his hand – that was kind of funny.'

However, Mick Box remembers Coverdale arriving with a bottle of Remy Martin and not Jack Daniel's, and he also has more positive thoughts of what he heard on that fateful afternoon. 'David sang a good audition,' he comments. 'But the offer to finance Whitesnake came in, and he was off.'

Ian Hunter later confirmed to *Record Collector* magazine that he had been invited to join the group.

'I was totally skint and they offered me £5,000 a week,' he related. 'I was sitting in America after my *All American Alien Boy* album, which had effectively killed me off. It was one of the best records I ever made so, of course, it died a horrible death. But I didn't really like what they did. I didn't see the point in it, and I don't think even Ken Hensley did after a while. [Hunter's guns-for-hire guitarist] Mick Ronson was the same if you can't do it, you shouldn't do it.'

Although some sources suggested it was Deep Purple bassist Roger Glover that put forward the name of John Lawton, other reports have also said that Mud drummer Dave Mount made the suggestion.

'Roger recommended him because he'd been on his solo album, *The Butterfly Ball*. He also had this killer voice, so we contacted John and it was a very easy choice,' clarifies Hensley. 'He came in and he had done his homework, he knew the songs right off. There was no problem.'

From start to finish the search for a new Heep singer had been completed in less than half a year. Said Ken at the time: 'It's been five months of very hard and sometimes frustrating work. The

beauty of it is though is that that hard work has now culminated in the formation of a much tighter, more professional and much more enjoyable band than we've ever had before.'

John Lawton was a comparative unknown. His main claim to fame was having sung with the German band, Lucifer's Friend and rather more alarmingly... Europop crew the Les Humphries Singers!

'I was very excited, but I didn't go overboard about it because when I got the first message I thought it was just a friend taking the mickey or something,' recalls Lawton of learning he had successfully got the job. 'When Ken actually did phone for the second time I took it very seriously, and it snowballed from there. I felt very comfortable about it, I wasn't so nervous that I couldn't do anything.'

Lawton may not have had his predecessor's rock star looks and even seemed a little short in the hair department, but Hensley sympathised with John's clear intention to try and develop his known persona as Heep's new frontman.

'I think John was right in trying to stamp his own identity,' he says. 'David's shoes were very tough to fill, in hindsight it was almost impossible. But rather than just try to mimic David, John stamped his own identity onto things. From that standpoint, that was fine. You'd get the odd comments here and there, but we all had our own idiosyncrasies. We felt if that was right, then we would be okay. But we had a long journey back in order to rebuild.'

Trevor Bolder, best known for a highly successful stint with David Bowie in the Spiders From Mars, was eventually appointed as Heep's new bassist. But they also considered former Long John Baldry and future Bedlam man Denny Ball – who later played on David Byron's *Take No Prisoners* album – for a while.

'I have good memories of the rehearsal when David Coverdale sang with us,' recalled Ball years later. 'I don't think Coverdale wanted the gig in the end, but it was out of my hands, and I was very, very disappointed not to join the band. At the time, Lee Kerslake said he wished that I had joined Heep!'

Tantalising, Ball reveals that somebody, somewhere must be in possession of some extremely valuable recordings. He says: 'Heep's rehearsal with Coverdale was recorded off the mixing console by the road crew. These were just cassettes, and I don't know what would have happened to them. They were probably used at the assessment meeting which decided the eventual line-up of the band. As for what we played at the session, most of it was jamming, with a couple of Chuck Berry songs thrown in for good measure.'

The arrival of Trevor Bolder certainly caused a few raised eyebrows, as the camped up theatricality of Bowie's style was not necessarily a perfect fit for the more masculine world of Heep.

At the time, Trevor explained: 'It's obviously a different style of music to what I did with Bowie. Bowie was more laid back; more like theatre. Whereas Uriah Heep are more of a heavy band, writing very melodic songs. I haven't played that sort of music for a long time, so coming in to Uriah Heep was a total change for me, I'm re-learning what I used to play like some time ago.'

While Ken Hensley welcomed Trevor, he also recognised how far the band now had to go in order to re-establish themselves.

'Obviously the most important thing is that after seven quite successful years, the group had a very strong identity around the world,' he said. 'We had to be committed to retaining that identity to some degree musically, but also to try to progress. So we had to look for people that would fit into the framework of Uriah Heep as it was known, but also help us to establish a new identity that would be as acceptable to our old fans.'

As always, Gerry Bron, was champing at the bit to get Uriah Heep back into the studio. With the new line-up now established, it was time to get moving on another album.

Bron: 'We were soon back in England recording at the Roundhouse Studio, which was a new studio for us. But we were very comfortable there, and very pleased with the results we were getting.'

Like many before him, John Lawton was shocked to find himself thrown into the recording process so quickly, and Bron admitted: 'It must have been very difficult for John especially being in the band for about three weeks, then doing an album straight off. But I thought both he and Trevor did it extremely well'.

'It turned out very well considering the short amount of time that Trevor and I had to work ourselves in,' comments Lawton. 'That album was already almost completed anyway, so basically I just had to go in and sing it. And as soon as it was ready we went out and toured for about six months.'

Trevor Bolder was similarly enthused, commenting: 'I really enjoyed it. For me, it was one of the quickest albums I've ever done. Everything went down in two or three takes and there was a lot of feel. Rather than what I'd been used to with Bowie, where we'd go in and play it for two hours and by the time you'd done that you were slightly losing the feel. With Heep they aimed for the feel more than anything, which was great.'

For Ken Hensley, 1977's *Firefly* album was something of a personal triumph. He had written seven of its eight songs as well as co-penning the opening track, *The Hanging Tree*. Furthermore, the album was remarkably well received by the fans.

'It was a completely new beginning for the band, which is what we needed at that time,' he says. 'It gave us the chance to experiment a bit more. Ultimately, that led to the release of the single *Wise Man*, which was a ballad. We'd never dared release anything like that before.'

'For me, *Wise Man* was one of the best recordings we'd ever made,' agreed Gerry Bron. 'But there were quite a few great numbers on that album. *Sympathy*, was certainly up there with the best, as was *Firefly* itself.'

Critically speaking, *Firefly* received a fairly neutral response. But in the light of the huge post-Byron void, mere apathy represented something of a triumph. So the band wasted little time in getting back out onto the road.

‘After the recording of *Firefly* and a lot of rehearsals, the band came together as a unit and we went out on the road to tour as Uriah Heep,’ says Mick. ‘We went into all the markets that we’d previously been into. We knew we had lost some ground and still had a lot of work to do, because it was a completely new band and we had to get people to adjust to the changes. They weren’t only musical changes, the chemistry was also very different. But we knew we could make it work.’

In an interview of the time, Ken stated that departures of both David and John had lain some of the ghosts to rest.

‘I’m looking forward to everything more now because I’ve got my pride back in what’s going on,’ he said. ‘Pride has a lot to do with it for me. Going on the road is very hard work, in fact being in the rock ‘n’ roll business is very hard work and it’s not worth doing unless you do it properly – unless you actually enjoy it. All the enjoyment and pleasure had gone out of it completely over the past couple of years, and it wasn’t until we put this line-up together that I realised how bad it had become. Now it’s so enjoyable that I’m really looking forward to everything that we’re going to do in the next few weeks.’

The next few weeks that Ken was referring to were the beginning of an exhaustive nine-month tour to capitalise upon what had been recognised as a big improvement upon the disappointing *High and Mighty*. But Hensley was already beginning to detect the first signs of trouble over at Bronze.

‘Gerry’s business was beginning to take off and he’d also taken on a bunch of other bands,’ recalls Ken. ‘He was very distracted, and we didn’t get the priority that we had been used to from Gerry’s time or from the label.’

In the UK, *Firefly* brought Uriah Heep a rare appearance in the British charts. With the *Wise Man* single in the Top Forty, they even appeared on *Top of the Pops*, which considering the disappearance of the 1971 *Old Grey Whistle Test* footage now remains the only existing piece of Heep in the BBC archive. For Mick Box, the *Top of the Pops* spot proved to be a personal nightmare, involving a

John Lawton brought a fantastic voice to the band but unfortunately lagged far behind David Byron in terms of stage craft and presence.



high-speed dash from New Mexico back to London. He'd been holidaying on a ranch so remote that had no phone. When the band were summoned to appear on the show, Bronze Records managing director Lillian Bron was forced to enlist the help of radio stations, local police and even neighbours of the ranch to track Box down, and once he'd been located time was so short that he had to be given a police escort to the airport, sirens blaring. *Wise Man* failed to climb much higher, but it helped to keep the flame alive.

The new-look Heep set out to promote the album, with Lawton applying make-up to his eyes each night. He told those who asked that although he'd never worn cosmetics onstage before, he was consciously trying to forge a persona different to that of David Byron. Not that the band took things too seriously, and at one particular show John bounded on from the wings, gabbed a microphone and felt it squelch in his grasp. His new band-mates had taken a banana and wrapped it in gaffer tape to conceal their joke.

One fan who would eventually play a large role in Heep's story was Dave Owen. The future mercho man was witnessing the band for the first time as they played to packed houses around Britain on the Firefly Tour. To say that it changed his life would be an understatement.

'I suppose at the of just thirteen I'd just wanted to be different,' admits Dave now. 'At school you were either Manchester United or Wolverhampton Wanderers; rock or pop. I swapped Michael Jackson's *Rockin' Robin* single for *Gypsy* by Uriah Heep, not even realising it was the B-side of *The Wizard*. It was just a belter of a riff, and everyone else was either a Deep Purple, Sabbath or Zeppelin fan, so I scribbled Uriah Heep on the side of my Adidas bag and went off to school. And thus started the longest-lasting relationship of my existence so far.'

Although Owen's biggest regret in life will always be missing the Byron-fronted band, the 1977 show he witnessed only solidified his commitment. 'The concert rocked,' he recalls. 'We were in the balcony and I swear it was moving. I still recall the tingling sensation in my

spine when the music started. We sat in the car afterwards and talked for hours about the show, we were so carried away we even took the wrong turning and drove the wrong way down the motorway!’

Despite the obvious quality of the album and the warmth of the UK reception, the loss of David Byron was nevertheless still keenly felt by many of the Heep faithful. In some territories the band’s audiences had fallen by as much as half. Louis Rentrop recalls seeing Heep playing before some 4,000 fans in a venue that had been filled by twice as many the previous year.

‘The show was as good as ever and we had the best of the new album alongside all the classics, but the crowd was definitely smaller,’ he states. ‘And Ken dedicated one song to all the people who didn’t come.’

Once again, it was time for Uriah Heep to dig deep and prepare to fight. Despite the preceding accusations, Gerry Bron insists that he was still very much dedicated to the Heep cause. He says: ‘It was quite a difficult thing, and we decided we just had to work very hard. So we set out to tour for about nine months and re-introduce the band to everybody, hopefully re-establishing the Heep name. After months of really hard work, we decided it was time for a new album.’

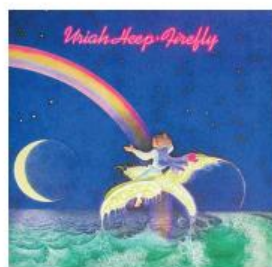
The new-look Heep had the honour of opening for US glam rockers Kiss on their Love Gun Tour, at the special request of the headliners themselves. Stresses Kiss guitarist/vocalist Paul Stanley: ‘We chose Uriah Heep to support us, and it was great having them out with us. They were incredibly professional, and so consistent that their worst nights were excellent, and their best ones were tremendous.’

The above quote was presumably offered before the final night of the pair’s tour, because Heep left the trek with one of their infamous stage pranks.

‘Each night there was a point at which they would bow down to the drummer riser, which hydraulically elevated into the sky,’ remembers Mick with a grin. ‘It was a real sight; there was a banner

with a big dragon and lots of lasers. What we did was make our own banner saying, 'Uriah Heep would like to thank Kiss for a great tour', and stitch it over the top of their dragon. On the last night, Simmons and Stanley had their heads bowed and Peter Criss was up way too high to see anything, but they must have wondered why it wasn't getting the usual reaction, and there was our message in huge, six-foot high letters. But by then we'd left the building, so they couldn't get their hands on us.'

A bill topping set at 1977's Reading Festival (supported by Golden Earring, Eddie and the Hot Rods, Widowmaker and a certain Welsh band called Lone Star) also provided new momentum. But although *Firefly* had begun to do the trick, the counter-argument existed that now was the perfect time for them to take stock and ensure that their music was absolutely right.



Album Track-by-Track

Firefly

Released February 1977

Album review by Louis Rentrop

Firefly is Uriah Heep's first album without David Byron. The fresh blood brought in to Uriah Heep consisted of singer John Lawton, who had achieved fame in Lucifer's Friend, and Trevor Bolder, bass player with David Bowie during the Ziggy Stardust era.

After the prestigious *High and Mighty*, produced by the band had failed to produce the expected level of sales, good old Gerry Bron took the helm in production once again. The result is a straight ahead album in Uriah Heep's best tradition.

The *Firefly* title was inspired in Ken Hensley during dinner at home in his garden in New Jersey. He saw a fantastic, eerie light in the shrubs. Ken walked inside and wrote the first lines for the title song. This guaranteed Heep's magic.

In the concert hall, the fans had to adjust to an entirely different Heep. It seemed that management had deliberately chosen to twist the band's on stage style and presentation through 180 degrees.

The flamboyant natural showman who was David Byron was now replaced by a new front man wearing a leather bat suit, eye-shadow and peacock feathers. Despite the questionable fashion sense John had an aggressive masculine aura and a particularly powerful voice.

The Jaap Edenhal in Amsterdam was sold out with 8 000 people present when Byron and Wetton were part of the band in February 1976. In March 1977 I saw Heep play with Lawton there and there were only 4 000 people. For many fans this Heep was no longer Heep.

Nonetheless, *Firefly* with songs like *The Hanging Tree*, *Firefly* and *Wise Man* is a very strong album and marks the start of a new phase in the life of Uriah Heep. With *Firefly* the geographical centre of popularity for Uriah Heep began the shift from the USA to the European continent.

The Hanging Tree (Williams/Hensley)

Ken Hensley favours his use of the synthesiser on this album. *The Hanging Tree* is the first indicator of that. It is clear straight away that there is no room for experiments on this album. The delightful guitar riff carries the song and John's first notes on record as the singer for Uriah Heep sound convincing. Trevor plays in a solid way without becoming over bearing. This song was oddly enough not part of the set list in 1977 although history tells us that this was one of the highlights on this album. Ken wrote it together with Jack Williams, a new name in Heepland. Fans were wondering who he was. In early 1977 that remained a mystery. Jack also left his mark on *Innocent Victim*.

Been Away Too Long (Hensley)

When you talk about straight ahead rock, *Been Away Too Long* is the prototype. The start is gentle and melodic. Soft synthesizers and

a gentle guitar soon give way to a rock song with intense emotion. It seems that Heep had taken a decision to record more and more 'ordinary' love songs. Ken, who wrote the majority of the material, seems to have distanced himself from the fantastical, mystic lyrics. Somehow this affects the music. There is little left to the imagination. A pure live song. At the end Lee and Mick get a chance to let their hair down and of course they do...

Who Needs Me? (Kerslake)

Lee Kerslake wrote this thumping simple rocker. Here we find no profound or philosophical lyrics either. Simply an ABC of rock, which went down very well at live shows. I recall that the band sometimes stretched the song out up to fifteen minutes during which the audience took the part in a call and response sequence to fill those fifteen minutes. *Who Needs Me?* was written at a time when several members of the band were facing personal difficulties. We, the fans had no idea about that. We simply enjoyed the music and kept on head banging.

Wise Man (Hensley)

You can say that *Wise Man* is the first real Heep ballad of the Lawton era and was to prove a highlight of the album. A song with hit potential it was to give the band a minor hit in their UK homeland and was to result in their one and only appearance on *Top of the Pops*. It is beautifully constructed. John's voice lends itself admirably to a multi vocal accompaniment. Mysticism returns here briefly. Who is the Wise Man? The Wizard? God? (Which way shall I run) writes Ken plaintively, he was to be in doubt many times when it came to the right track in his life, both musically and personally over the next few years.

Do You Know (Hensley)

A steaming live song. It rumbles through your speakers with all the

Heep ingredients. Play it as loud as you can. Or better still some day we might witness it live. Simple and straight forward what stands out is the big role allocated to the synthesizer, this is the instrument which Ken now favours for his solos rather than his faithful hammond. It seems as if Mick's role as a guitar player is pushed to the background. The trade mark Box wah-wah would have been great here. Ken's star was certainly in the ascendant with Gerry Bron at the time but he was still contributing the lion's share of the best material so fairs' fair.

Rolling On (Hensley)

At six-and-a-half minutes long, *Rolling On* does seem to over stay it's welcome. The lazy funky pace and bass rhythm have an essence which is not altogether Heep. The vocal melodies sound fine though and Ken's slide guitar on a bed of heavenly synthesiser is reminiscent of the wonderful solo in *Paradise/The Spell*, Trevor grabs the spotlight with his inventive bass lines. It doesn't sparkle, but is still catchy because of the swinging groove.

Sympathy (Hensley)

While we were waiting to buy tickets for Heep's show in Amsterdam in 1977, a radio was playing in the queue. The unmistakable sound of *Sympathy* filled the air. The song had made it into the Dutch charts. A catchy, upbeat Hensley rhythm allied to a neat melody made this a great song. Ken also plays the guitar solo. Clean and neat, but Mick's earthy street sound is again missed here.

Firefly (Hensley)

The epic and title song of this album. Infrequently performed live and still much requested, long after this line-up had split. To my taste this is the best of Ken Hensley since *Return to Fantasy*. *Firefly* consists of three parts. Part one starts off with the same heavenly synthesizer which we have heard in various songs. (My love lives at





This Uriah Heep line-up of the late 1970s (left to right: Mick Box, Trevor Bolder, John Lawton, Ken Hensley and Lee Kerslake) released three studio albums: *Firefly*, *Innocent Victim* and *Fallen Angel*.

the end of a rainbow) is one of the most beautiful opening lines I know. Ken does the lead vocals. The chorus contains the piano and lovely harmony singing by Lawton and Hensley.

The second part starts with Ken on guitar with a dry, short riff. The vocals are tight and staccato. Trevor makes his bass dance while Ken plays the solo on the guitar. The third part consists of a relaxed acoustic guitar outro and the pure Hammond organ. John sings lead for the first time in this part of the song and takes the classic song to a harmonic end.



After an incredible run of eleven studio albums in seven years, the danger always existed that Heep might have hit a barren spell at precisely the wrong time. In retrospect it would probably have been better to have waited till the strongest material was available. Once again, commercial pressure eventually won the day, and Heep found themselves back in the studio again all too soon. And sure enough, *Innocent Victim* – also released in 1977 – turned out to be disappointing.

‘The *Innocent Victim* album probably wasn’t our best overall effort,’ concedes Gerry Bron. ‘But it did produce *Free Me*, the band’s biggest hit single in Europe. The interesting thing about *Free Me* was that it was one of the last numbers we recorded for the album. I remember Ken coming in with the demo and we were all completely knocked out with it. I think we recorded that particular number in two days flat.’

‘It was instant,’ agrees Box. ‘There was no extended writing or rehearsal period – it just emerged. And everybody was very excited about it.’

‘It sounded like a hit from the minute we heard the demo,’ purrs Bron contentedly. ‘And it certainly did a lot to put the band back on the right track commercially. In Germany we were soon back playing

venues which were as big if not bigger than anything we had played previously.'

Ken Hensley: 'There are elements of *Innocent Victim* that I still like. I'll never forget that when I took *Free Me* into the studio we had already practically finished the album. So I recorded it at home with a couple of the other guys and when Gerry heard it he said we had to record it immediately. It was cool because John [Lawton] was part of that and we had a No. 1 single for the first time in a long time. So the future looked really good at that point.'

The album, which was heavier than some of its predecessors, was especially notable for the fact that it included two non-Hensley compositions: the over-ambitious *The Dance*, with its slightly confused reggae feel, and the far superior *Choices*, which closes the disc in suitably climactic fashion. Both these songs were penned by an American writer and then roommate of Hensley's, Jack Williams. In Germany, particularly, *Innocent Victim* was an enormous success, selling over a million copies and becoming the band's biggest album until that point. Incredibly, the period also saw Heep sitting pretty no less than three times in the German Top 20, with *Wise Man* (from *Firefly*), the award-winning *Lady in Black* and *Free Me* all proving dominant.

Heep's old sparring partner Geoff Barton reviewed *Innocent Victim* with more than a touch of reluctance. Addressing the now very real possibility that the group might still be making music when the writer reached the grand old age of sixty, Barton admitted he didn't know 'whether to laugh or cry' at the thought. The album, proclaimed Geoff was 'Alright. Not world-shattering, epoch-making, mind-blowing, senses-shattering, soul-searing, the pinnacle of greatness... just alright.'

Again, Rudolf Schenker of the Scorpions witnessed Heep playing live, this time from the side of the stage after his band had opened a show in Basel, Switzerland. The guitarist beamed: 'Uriah Heep have always been one of my favourite English bands. I always liked

Gypsy and *Lady in Black*, and I used to go and see them a lot when I was younger. One of my funniest memories is of when we supported them because we played another encore, and their singer, [the bilingual Lawton] came on stage to get us off. I thought he was going to beat us up!’

The success of *Free Me* was certainly good news, but the wildfire success of the single hid some serious flaws on the album. Bob Carruthers is probably typical of many Heep fans that had happily bought into the new line-up only to become disenchanted second time out.

‘It was the first time ever that I had been disappointed by a Heep recording,’ admits Bob now. ‘The *Firefly* album had been a really solid offering, and I had expected big things from the next one. Unfortunately, the magic just wasn’t there. It lacks that sense of drama, the kind of gothic theatre which Heep had always produced somewhere on every album. There was no *Midnight*, *Return to Fantasy* or *Wonderworld* to provide a heavyweight masterpiece. But having said that, the Innocent Victim Tour which took in the Usher Hall was a great night out.’

John Lawton agrees that *Innocent Victim* wasn’t all that it could have been.

‘There are some good numbers on there, but it wasn’t consistent enough,’ he states. ‘And then, out of the blue, there was the hit single [*Free Me*]. It turned out to be Heep’s biggest single ever in Europe. It went straight in at No. 1 in Germany and stayed there for about five or six weeks. And it had nothing to do with what Heep were doing before that; it was a straightforward pop song. So consequently this was seen as the way to go. And after that we started to write weird pop songs. That just wasn’t me, I can’t write pop songs to save my life. For me, *Free ’N’ Easy* was what it was all about – blood and guts.’

Although Heep’s profile seemed to be on the rise again, behind the scenes old wound were festering. Lee Kerslake still felt very strongly

that Gerry Bron was ignoring material submitted by band members other than Hensley, which in return stirred up feelings of fury from the keyboard player.

Kerslake: 'I was beginning to get really angry at what was happening in the studio. Gerry seemed to favour Ken's material above anything else.'

In any band it's the writers that receive the lion's share of the royalties from publishing, so the more material a particular writer has on an album, the more that individual's share. This had resulted in a situation where Ken's earnings were significantly outstripping those of the others. And with Gerry Bron now back in the producer's chair, there appeared to be little prospect of the situation changing. For his part, Ken now admits that he did less than he should to have hidden the trimmings of success. But maybe was unreasonable to expect a thirty-two-year-old millionaire rock star to have behaved in any other way. However, the flaunting of a constant stream of flash cars frustrated Kerslake, who was about to enter a messy and costly divorce.

Bron admits: 'Ken earned much more because he wrote the songs. It allowed him to do so much more; he had his motor racing team interests, a big home with built-in studios and his collection of cars.'

These days, Bron acknowledges that keeping management, production and record company under one collection roof would quite rightly be deemed a conflict of interest. However, he firmly insists that nothing immoral ever took place, stating: 'It was only because we were doing all those things together that Uriah Heep became successful. Far from being a conflict, we were able to make unified decisions, and make them ourselves. I think it worked extremely well.'

And on the subject of favouritism towards Hensley he also responds: 'The others felt they weren't given a chance to write, and I got the blame for that because as producer I picked the songs. But I only ever picked the songs that I felt should see the light of day.'

According to Hensley, his own dominant role was a reluctant one. He says: 'We were always on deadlines, and I always hated that because there was always a call for another twelve songs, and they all had to be like *Easy Livin'*. I could never respond to that. But maybe I wasn't working as hard as I used to because I was guilty of enjoying the trappings of success.'

To add to the mounting discontent there were the first murmurings of friction between Ken and John Lawton. Hensley found the constant presence of Lawton's wife Iris on the road to be intrusive. For his part, as revealed earlier, John had his own disagreements over the band's musical direction. The singer felt that these were real issues that needed to be resolved.

'So, we sat down and tried to do so,' says John. 'But it didn't work out. You could almost feel the rift developing in between us. A couple of us were saying, 'Let's go back to what we're all about, do some really good, kicking stuff'. And the rest were seeing pound signs rolling in their eyes and thinking of commercial pop songs to follow *Free Me*. To me, that's how the rift began.'

The enormous success of *Free Me* had actually served to disguise the real problem, which now manifested itself in a steady erosion of fan support. Although thousands of newcomers had bought *Innocent Victim* on the strength of the single, the album really wasn't good enough to sustain their interest, or to make converts wade into the back catalogue. At the same time, hardcore stalwarts who'd supported the group began to drift away. Even future webmaster Dave White was among those whose enthusiasm waned.

'It was sometime around 1978 when I lost track of them,' admits Dave. 'I suppose *Innocent Victim* was one of the reasons. It just didn't have that indefinable Heepiness. Even so I still went to the 'U' section in stores, I always had the music with me. It never faded.'

Following swiftly on the heels of *Free Me*, the *Salisbury* track *Lady in Black* made an unexpected entry into the German charts, providing the German equivalent of a Grammy for the unsuspecting

but grateful Uriah Heep. As it did so, the band were still trying to puzzle out why an obscure track from a six year old album should suddenly come from nowhere to storm to No. 1.



Album Track-by-Track

Innocent Victim

Released September 1977

Album review by Louis Rentrop

Only six months after the release of *Firefly*, *Innocent Victim* was in the stores. This was the second album with John Lawton and Trevor Bolder. In his writing duties, Ken was assisted by Jack Williams who co-wrote three songs. It is clearly audible that Trevor has found his place in Heep. His jazzy scale driven bass lines distinctly mark the Heep sound in 1977.

Maybe it was too soon on the heels of *Firefly* but the writing seemed to be distinctly poorer. In consequence the first reviews by fans and by the press were half-hearted. The long standing Heep fans were confirmed in their beliefs that the old Heep would not return. The single *Free Me* was so lightweight that many more turned their backs on Heep altogether.

What saved the band was a huge unexpected success in Germany.

For some unexplained reason, six years after it's first release *Lady in Black* suddenly became a big hit in Germany in 1977. It yielded a Golden Lion, the prestigious prize from Radio Luxembourg, the radio equivalent of an Emmy Award. The success of *Lady in Black* was followed by *Free Me*, which was another big hit. Suddenly the new Heep was on every German TV show.

In Holland at the time you couldn't open up a magazine without our men staring back at you. But was this what was left of the Heep legacy musically? Was it now just a pop band? The magazines and TV shows certainly made you believe so. The live shows were rocking just

‘There was always a call for another twelve songs, and they all had to be like *Easy Livin’*. I could never respond to that. But maybe I wasn’t working as hard as I used to because I was guilty of enjoying the trappings of success.’

– Ken Hensley



like in the old days though. The hit songs, the distinctive sleeve and the many, many posters plastered in every German town guaranteed sold out stadium sized venues and brought in thousands of new fans. Whether the album delivered its part of the bargain remains in doubt.

Keep On Riding (Hensley/Williams)

Innocent Victim starts off with a song by Ken Hensley and Jack Williams. It's an up tempo song, with a catchy tune and a chorus, but it lacks the essential Heep spirit and strays into a distinct country and western mode. Sure, it is well played but Jack's country influences are too prominent. Trevor's bass playing stands out notably for his rhythmic/insistent swinging style. Despite opening the album, as far as I know the song has never been played live.

Flying High (Hensley)

Flying High resembles *Keep On Riding* in many ways. Also an up tempo song and again Trevor Bolder's bouncy wandering bass lines make the grade. Ken's slide is featured in the solos. Where is Mick I wonder? Lost in the mix seems to be the answer. Gerry Bron and Ken Hensley must have had a mainstream, radio-friendly album in mind. *Firefly* was therefore more of a Heep album than *Innocent Victim*. It wouldn't surprise me if Mick's guitar sound was then regarded as an impediment to commercial airplay. Something had definitely changed the signature sound of band.

Roller (Bolder/McDonald)

The first hard rocking song on this album, it was co-written by Trevor. Here the band rages like in the good old days. The tried and tested Heep build up is used. A quiet funky start and then all hell breaks loose. The funky style however is distinctive and highly unusual for Heep and raises questions whether this is a typical Heep song. Again the slide guitar is featured a great deal. Mick's

contribution is again buried somewhere in the mix. John's vocal contribution is vital to the song and again proves the worth of his amazing voice.

Free 'n' Easy (Lawton/Box)

This is the first result of collaboration between Box and Lawton. Of all songs on this album, this is the one that stood the test of time as a great live song. It needs two guitars though. Since Ken left the band, this great little rock song is no longer be featured in the live set. That was why it was such a highlight at the Magician's Birthday Party 2001. Guest Ken Hensley and Mick Box once again duelled in a ripping guitar fight with the audience being the winners. Because of the radio-friendly production the heavy character of the song is disguised in the rather lightweight mix.

Illusion (Hensley)

A song Ken had worked out in his own studio. I've always thought of this as a 'goody-goody' and rather dispensable song. Even John's voice sounds overly polished. Collectively Heep demonstrate that harmony singing is still their trademark. No other band can do it in quite the same way.

Ken still loves his synthesiser; he performs wizardry with one beautiful melody after another. The song ends in a catchy way with an acoustic guitar which fades slowly giving us a tantalising glimpse of what appears to be a new section of the song. The mystery is solved when, on the B-side of the single *Free Me* we first find the track *Masquerade*, which turns out to be the second part of *Illusion*. In the CD era the song would no doubt have been released as a single track but it seems that a vinyl era album had to be cut short so the album lacks the epic finisher which might have helped it to achieve greater esteem among Heep fans.

Free Me (Hensley)

The most lightweight song Uriah Heep ever recorded. Ken and Mick later told us that the song was added last minute. The band certainly considered it of little worth but events were about to prove them wrong.

Ken especially was amazed when the two-chord-song *Lady in Black* became a world wide hit and the band was even more surprised when this same thing happened to *Free Me*.

In Germany *Free Me* and *Lady in Black* appeared simultaneously in the charts. Heep was back on top in much of Europe, but I often wondered what the new fans who had bought concert tickets on the strength of *Free Me* felt like after a Heep live stage show had assaulted their senses with *Gypsy*. Confused but ecstatic I imagine!

Cheat 'n' Lie (Hensley)

A slow starter which finds it's strength in a characteristic Heep chorus, trademark oohs and aahs giving way to a swinging rhythm section and outstanding vocals by John. In some ways this could be the title track as it is the only time we hear the line *Innocent Victim* sung on the album. The lyrics leave nothing to your imagination. It's a theme Ken will revisit in many different ways. A period of intense cocaine addiction certainly didn't help his personal relationship with the world at large. Paranoia is an unfortunate result of this scourge of the music world but then cheating and lying certainly play their part too.

The Dance (Williams)

Written by Jack Williams, it doesn't sound like Heep at all. A slow pace, a funky sound. It appeals to me nevertheless. The organ tune is catchy. The lyrics offer the listeners a dreamy quality and the bass playing is inspired. The effect of the song is enticing and charming. 'Tonight the picture has no frame... Tonight the spirit brings the news.' Mr Williams has learnt a lot from Mr Hensley.

Choices (Williams)

Another Jack Williams song *Choices* concludes the album in disappointing fashion. *Innocent Victim* needed to end on a high with an epic killer masterpiece. This is just tired. You can't say that the writers were in their most prolific phase. The band had clearly run out of songs and Jack Williams was not the man to supply them. *Choices* is a prime example of the pedestrian quality of much of Heep's output at the time.

For that reason *Innocent Victim* was not an artistic success for Heep. Commercially it did succeed because of the success of *Free Me*, it was crystal clear that the band (i.e. Hensley/Bron) would look for more of this commercial success. The next album would contain even more of singles only commercial formula. 'We all make our choices' is something of an apt phrase in the circumstances.



If *Innocent Victim* had disappointed the rock-starved Heep faithful, the next album – 1978's *Fallen Angel* – continued the doubtful trend towards a more pop orientated Uriah Heep. *Fallen Angel* was an appropriate title for an album that, over twenty years on, is still worthy of a listen, but just wasn't true to the essence of what made Uriah Heep great in the first place. Pure pop songs such as *Love or Nothing* and *One More Night* did little to sustain the faithful who longed for the power, pomp and majesty of *Circle of Hands*, but were now forced on to a steady diet of well crafted, but ultimately unsatisfying pop songs.

As always, the album's main architect was Ken Hensley. And it's no surprise that his view differs radically from many fans: 'Now I really like the *Fallen Angel*' album. It has some great songs, and despite some of the tensions around at the time we had a good time recording it.'

'I really enjoyed recording it, especially *Come Back to Me*, which I still think is a great song,' agrees Mick Box. 'I must admit, I would

have preferred to have steered closer to our rock roots. But it's still a great album.'

Fallen Angel also spawned another major European hit single in the shape of *Come Back to Me*. It was written principally by Lee (in conjunction with Ken), who was to experience an uncharacteristic success in getting one of his compositions past Gerry Bron.

'For me, *Come Back to Me* was a very special song,' offers Kerslake. 'It was written about the break up of my first marriage and the pain of losing my family in the process. It came straight from the heart, there was real pain there and you can hear it in the song. It was a real cry from the heart.'

Incredibly, considering both the album's patchy nature and the regularity with which he'd panned the band, Geoff Barton of all people wrote a four-star critique of *Fallen Angel*.

'Some effort has been made to dig the band out of a rut and give their sound an extra added cutting edge,' stated Barton. 'High-powered vocal harmonising/interchanging/overdubbing lends a Queen-type dynamism to proceedings. Purple-esque guitar riffs are pushed well upfront, not lost in the usual test-your-stereo production sterility. Ken Hensley submits some unusually deft keyboard embellishments. And most of all, bassist Trevor Bolder has been allowed to blossom into an Andy Fraser [Free]-type figure; unashamedly driving the sound along with drummer Lee Kerslake and giving the rest of the players some much-needed impetus.'

Although the success of *Come Back to Me* kept the Heep show on the road during 1978 and into the following year, internal tensions were still rising. Lawton's insistence upon keeping his family on the road with him was proving too much for Hensley, and it also brought the band to the brink of genuine violence.

'Recording the album was okay, I was dealing with my drug thing as best I could,' admits Ken. 'But there was a lot of conflict within the band, particularly over songs and how they were chosen for albums and things like that. It was all stuff that was irrelevant – stuff



Heep at the time of the *Fallen Angel* sessions in 1978. By now the heart had left the band and the music was a shadow of its former self, nonetheless these sessions produced the brilliance of the Kerslake-penned *Come Back to Me*.



that would never had surfaced a few years before. But now all these niggling things were getting bigger and bigger, and quite honestly I was getting closer and closer to wanting to quit.

‘The conflict with John just grew, we were totally disillusioned and we just didn’t know what to do. So Mick and I took the drastic step of deciding to get rid of John because he had caused this rift between himself and the band. We all were getting into physical fights with tour managers and band members. It was ugly, and I just really didn’t want to be a part of it anymore. I didn’t know what else I wanted to do, but once again Gerry [Bron] talked me into staying.’

It didn’t take a nuclear physicist to work out that the tensions between Kerslake and Bron on one side and Hensley and Lawton on the other were unworkable. The band did begin recording a fourth album with Lawton, but the process was abandoned ignominiously with the sudden departure of both Lee Kerslake and John Lawton. Once again Uriah Heep were down to a trio.



Album Track-by-Track

Fallen Angel

Released July 1978

Album review by Louis Rentrop

Fallen Angel is the third and last album with the John Lawton lineup. *Innocent Victim* was a winner when we talk about commercial success and chart success. Especially in Germany, Uriah Heep was firmly back on top when this album was released. People were on the look out for new Heep material with high expectations.

With this release however, Heep strayed a long way from the musical hallmarks to be found on albums like *Sweet Freedom* and *Return to Fantasy*. In less than three years’ time Heep had changed from a hard rocking band to a pop band bent on Top 40 success.

Still, when we look at the sleeve we see a somewhat racy female warrior who is ready for the fight. It looks like it will be a hard and heavy album. The inner sleeve reveals the reality. A sweet picture of the musicians smiling at Ken Hensley's little daughter. The truth is that the success of *Free Me* and *Lady in Black* led to a search for chart sensitive melodies and a polished sound in the studio. Ken Hensley's raging Hammond and Mick's earthy wah-wah sounds seemed to belong in a distant past.

Is this a bad album though? Well certainly not to my ears. John Lawton had grown with each album and there were some really good compositions. None of the Hensley songs are my favourites, I prefer songs like *Woman of the Night* (Box/Lawton/Kerslake) and *I'm Alive* (Lawton). Both are strong songs you want to hear live. After the release of this album, the band tour with Kiss in the USA. In Europe they performed at the well-known Jazz Bilzen festival. *Love or Nothing* was a success in the German charts. A catchy song but in reality it's nothing that special by comparison with what had gone before, or indeed was to come later. *Come Back to Me* was also released as a single and had some chart success but didn't do enormously well. Eventually the band was in ferment. While recording the fourth album there was a serious personality clash. Hensley decided John had to leave. Of this partially recorded album, some mutilated recordings surfaced in the 1990's. It is clear that on what would have been the next album the band was looking for more chart successes so perhaps it is all just for the best.

Woman of the Night (Box/Lawton/Kerslake)

A great, original sounding, rocking song. Well built up with a catchy riff. Overall the production of the album has a strange muted quality which seems to stifle the few real rockers like this. You have to add some bass when playing this album. That way *Woman of the Night* metamorphoses from lightweight back into hard rock song. Fortunately Mick is more audible than on *Innocent Victim*, but he

clearly holds back. Some of his battery of effects pedals have been overlooked. Fortunately they return later on. Lee is tight on the drums and Trevor shines as always. You can hear that the rhythm section has really settled down as a tight consistent unit. As the opening song and a highlight, with all the Heepy elements present.

Falling in Love (Hensley)

A hot paced tune with nice vocal melodies. *Falling in Love*, a great sing-along song. This is a song that the producer (never mind that it says all songs are arranged by Uriah Heep) had in mind trying to create a hit. The chorus is repeated an awful lot though.

One More Night (The Last Farewell) (Hensley)

A boogie song. That is the way the drums and bass are played. You just have to move when you listen to this. Not very special, but the vocal melodies are there. Again the chorus is repeated indefinitely. *Lady in Black* included a hell of a lot of la-la's, *Free Me* had too many 'free me's. It must have been felt at the time that the power of repetition was the road to success. However, we can't get further from the truth.

Put Your Lovin' On Me (Lawton)

'Lady, oh lady, you're driving me crazy.' We're dealing with a love song: that much is clear. The album has many more of those. The slow plodding rhythm briefly develops into a classic Heep explosion but overall the song is rather pedestrian. John Lawton reaches his top form here. He sings like never before, the man is in top shape as a singer but as a composer he never really scales the heights.

Come Back to Me (Kerslake/Hensley)

A beautiful ballad, written principally by Lee Kerslake. You can hear it is straight from the heart. The pain is real. This is what makes songs like this one special. Lee wasn't having an easy time in his personal life. It was the painful spur for him to create the best

composition of his career to date. If you talk to him about it, he is still really proud of the song which deals with the hurt of divorce and the consequent loneliness and loss. The song was returned to its full glory during the recordings of *Acoustically Driven* in London, in 2000. This is the undoubted highlight of the album. One of the great Heep songs.

Whad'ya Say (Hensley)

One of the better songs. Ken releases rippling threads of synthesiser which give the song a playful character. It opens with a catchy melody and finger snapping (at least it sounds like that) bass line. Never mind the repetition of the title what seems like a hundred times. The power of this composition is combined in melody, rhythm breaks and vocal melodies. It could have been a hit, but somehow it never got that kind of attention. I wish it might still be played at a Magician's Birthday Party some day.

Save It (Bolder/McDonald)

An unnecessary filler in my opinion. The song could easily have been a part of the set list of an American southern boogie band. Radio-friendly was the credo in the studio at the time, so that could explain it. Ken's slide guitar stands out and again John's unparalleled voice. This man is a master! Chris Mercer plays a bit of sax to no particular effect. The band seems to run out of ideas. The 'save it all for me' hook is again repeated ad nauseum on the outro.

Love or Nothing (Hensley)

The hit song on *Fallen Angel*. Hensley, demonstrates he still does know how to write a simple and original melody line. The other band members obviously played important parts in the final result. It was that combination that made Heep songs so beautiful. *Love or Nothing* climbed the charts in Germany. The vocal melodies, acoustic guitar, sweet bass notes and the great organ made it a slice of pure

pop that lingered in your brain. I've always considered the heavy guitar break as an unwanted interruption. If I had had a say in it, it would have smoothly continued in lalala's. I still listen to this song a lot. I like it's up lifting positive quality.

I'm Alive (Lawton)

John's composition. The loudest song on the album without a doubt. Heep rocks in an old fashioned style without much in the way of frills. The riff is strong enough on its own, the bass is fantastic and Lee is finally allowed to beat the skins of his drums, which he does powerfully with some strong rolls and fills. I would have loved hearing Mick's wah-wah sound on this one. In this era Mick, who is now the band's leading man, seemed to have been demoted to the long serving guitar player and side-man hardly making his presence noticeable. A great loss to the overall feel of this Hensley dominated album.

Fallen Angel (Hensley)

The last single of this album. The novelty on this track is the synthesizer-drums. His known forceful playing on the conventional drum kit sounds thin by comparison, the synthesised sound of these like small irritating ricochets from distant bullets is fine for discos but distracting and unnecessary on a Heep album. The spirit of the age, I guess. Nevertheless, the build up of the song is clever. Heep's vocal harmonies are very strong indeed. The sound of the acoustic guitars make it a treat for your ears. It lacks the power of *Free Me* or *Love or Nothing* but it is still one of the better pieces on this album.

This closes a lightweight Heep album which Ken was, and still is, very happy with. Lee, Trevor and Mick wanted to return to the hard rocking true Heep sound. Inside the band, heated discussions were held. It was agreed the next album had to sound different. It certainly did. The fans were about to be tested once more.



Chapter 2

The Conquest Experiment

The departures of Lee Kerslake and John Lawton meant that for the second time in three years, Uriah Heep found themselves in need of two new recruits. With a tenth anniversary tour looming, something had to be done... and fast. Filling the drum stool had never posed too many problems for them in the past, having already used four different incumbents during the previous nine-year spell.

‘My reason for departing was arguments with the management, political arguments,’ Kerslake recently revealed. ‘We were just about to do another album, and I’d had enough of Gerry Bron and Ken Hensley siding together and trying to wheedle people in and out [of the line-up], trying to run the band. I said, ‘I gotta get out of here, it’s ripping me to pieces’. I could see myself getting into heavy drinking,

so I wanted to go away and prove myself. It's damaging if you get your confidence knocked enough times – very mentally damaging. So I decided to go.'

Post-Heep, Kerslake put together a project with Manfred Mann's Colin Pattenden and future Go West star Pete Cox, but before anything serious could come of things he got a phone call from a German promoter asking whether he'd consider joining a new band being assembled for ex-Black Sabbath singer Ozzy Osbourne.

Perhaps inevitably, Hensley recalls Kerslake being sacked by Heep instead of being allowed the dignity of tendering his resignation. In a 2001 interview with *Classic Rock* magazine, Ken offered his own version of events.

'Lee felt that there had been collusion between Gerry and myself that resulted in the exclusion of everybody else's songs, and he came to us in a meeting and put that allegation to us,' he recalled. 'It was a really foolish thing for him to have done. It may have appeared that way, but for every song that Lee wrote, I wrote twenty. And for every song that Trevor wrote, I also wrote twenty. So when it was time to record an album, by sheer force of numbers there would be more of my songs on the album – even if you ignore the fact that I have written every single genuine hit that the band have ever had. And that fact stands to the present day.

'Being the band's producer and manager, Gerry's answer was simply that he had a responsibility to pick the best material from every source possible. Gerry's motivation was to sell as many records as possible, and through that for us all to make as much money as possible. Was Gerry gonna make more money through picking Lee's songs, or my songs? Of course not, all our publishing deals were the same. So there was really no basis for that comment. And it was unfortunate because as a result of that conversation, Lee was fired from the band.'

It proved relatively simple to recruit a first class musician, this time in the form of percussionist Chris Slade, who had been with

Bronze label-mates Manfred Mann's Earth Band. Slade joined Heep at the suggestion of Gerry Bron, having toured with them on many occasions with his previous group and knowing them on a casual basis.

'I can't completely remember how it happened but I think Gerry rang me and asked whether I'd be interested in joining,' comments Slade now. 'From what I understand, he and Lee Kerslake had had a really big row. And Lee had walked out. So Gerry wanted me to come in and go over Lee's drum parts in the studio, which wasn't easy because they'd leaked out into the other parts of the tracks. So in order to cover things up he wanted me to play a lot busier than would've chosen to – it was like, "More fills, more fills". And I was like, "More?!" I wasn't really used to playing like that.'

Mick Box had already made an impression upon Slade during the pair's previous encounters. Chris says: 'I'd already met Mick and he was a really nice guy, a great character. The others weren't too friendly, shall I say. But I'd never really socialised with any of them during that time on the road. Gary Thain was actually in the band when I first met them, he was a good player.'

Unfortunately, appointing a new frontman was to prove a considerably more time-consuming and problematic task than finding a new sticksman. Trapeze singer Pete Goalby had already auditioned, but eventually failed to make the final cut. This later proved a crucial issue for Ken Hensley, who preferred Goalby to the group's eventual choice, ex-Lone Star man John Sloman. The latter had appeared with future UFO guitarist Paul 'Tonka' Chapman on Lone Star's second album, 1977's *Firing on All Six*, and had also spent time honing his stagecraft in various Canadian groups, notably with Pulsar.

'It was me that thought of John first,' recalls Trevor Bolder. 'We were really struggling to think of the right guy, and then it came to me, "What about that geezer from Lone Star?" Tony Smith, a friend of mine, knew him so I rang him and after about a hundred phone calls we finally got John along for the auditions, and that was that.'

Trevor explains the logic of the appointment by stating: 'We wanted somebody to front the band who looked really good, and who had a good stage presence... to do the sort of thing that David Byron had done. It was bound to be a one in a million, someone who could go out and front us with no problems.'

Musically and visually, Sloman was the antithesis of his predecessor. He was younger and better looking than Lawton and was possessed of an enviably luxurious head of hair. Sloman was certainly more than capable of fronting the band to the required standards, and he could also play keyboards and guitar, which in the words of Mick Box made him 'a bit of an all-rounder.'

But, like all the rest, only time would tell how well he would be able to interact with his new colleagues.

'I'm certain that John Sloman was the wrong choice. By bringing him on board what happened was that two issues surfaced,' later insisted Ken. 'One was that it created a real division between myself and the rest of the band. And the other was that it really helped me to make up my mind that I longer wanted to be a part of it [the band]. It was a really bad time.'

However, Trevor recalls that, initially at least, Ken seemed to be as enthusiastic about the newcomer as all the others.

'He was behind it all the way, everyone agreed on what was needed,' insists Bolder now. Mick Box agrees: 'At the time, Ken never said anything about not wanting John in the band. Think about it, if only one person in the band was being listened to by Gerry Bron – that was Ken Hensley, of course – then if Ken hadn't wanted Sloman in the band, do you really think he'd have been there?'

'John came along and he offered a bit more than Pete Goalby, and they were both given a song to sing in the studio,' continues Box, taking up the theme of why Sloman was chosen. 'Pete had treated his like Paul Rodgers, even though he sang it well, but Sloman gave us multiple dimensions. We also knew he was a good-looking boy and he had the range we needed. Pete didn't extent his voice to its fullest,

but John went from the bottom note right to the top. We knew he'd be able to hit that high note in *July Morning*, but Ken had every opportunity to have stopped it from happening. So I don't buy into that.'

Adds Bolder: 'We had even been prepared to lose a little in the voice department if someone who had the right image came along, but with John we thought we'd got the voice as well. He obviously looked great in that Robert Plant kind of way, and in the studio he also sounded the part. So we thought we'd got it one hundred percent right.'

Even press comment of the era seemed to welcome the group's choice. The verdict of *Musician's Weekly* was typical, stating: 'It's good to see a really dynamic band that's been shunted up the wrong siding, successfully reversing back out and setting itself back on the right tracks. In John Sloman, Heep have now got the man who could put them back where they belong, without having to revisit past successes.'

'John's writing is an untried influence that must shape the band's progress. The time that Sloman has spent in Canada wasn't wasted. He clearly feels that he went out there a failure trying to be someone apart from himself, and came back with a clear picture of his inner self and confidence in his new-found abilities as a showman. In private, he's like the other members of the band. Unassuming and unafraid, quick with a joke and full of humour. They should do well together.'

Many things have been said and written about Uriah Heep during the past three decades, but that last sentence must surely rate as one of the worst predictions ever! The marriage of John Sloman and Uriah Heep was to provide such friction that the band eventually shook themselves apart at the seams.

It didn't take long for things to go wrong, and the first signs of potential conflict arrived during the recording of the next album, *Conquest*. Looking back on the situation, Bolder simply describes it





Uriah Heep in early 1980 shortly after the release of the *Conquest* album. In September of the same year Ken Hensley quit the band. According to Hensley: 'The band had chosen John [Sloman, seen far right] and I had opposed that decision. He was a good musician and he looked great but I thought he had little going for him vocally. The way that he interpreted songs were totally different to the way I had written them.'

as: a mess. Elaborates Mick Box: 'John certainly had plenty of ideas and in one sense they were welcome because we felt we needed a change of direction. But that direction should have been a rock-based one. Sometimes it felt a bit too much like Stevie Wonder, who I have nothing against, but he ain't Uriah Heep!'

For Ken, the threat lay not just in the type of songs that Sloman was submitting, but also in the volume of material. John's prodigious output obviously posed a direct threat to Ken's role as the Heep's chief composer. There was also the distinct feeling that the group were starting to polarise into two camps, with Ken and Chris Slade on one side, and the others grouped around Sloman as the new champion of a more varied spread of writing influences.

As for *Conquest* itself, the album remains the most hotly debated item in Heep's extensive catalogue. To provide an indication of the turmoil, a single called *Think It Over* was issued in January as a taster of what was to follow, but it would not find a proper home for another two years.

Released in February 1980, *Conquest* was supported by an inspired marketing campaign by Bronze Records and even received some uncharacteristically encouraging responses from the media, including a five-star critique from *Record Mirror*'s Robin Smith, who lavished great praise on the band's new direction, while the influential *Sounds* magazine even described the album as 'a minor masterwork'.

Chris Slade recently heard *Conquest* again for the first time since playing on the record, and his impressions were also favourable.

'I was playing with Asia and our tour manager was a big heavy music fan,' he explains. 'Anyway, one day he put the *Conquest* album on, and I actually didn't recognise who it was until he told me it was me,' Chris chortles. 'And you know what, it wasn't half bad!'

Nevertheless, the fans were strictly divided. A minority found the album fresh and invigorating, but the vast majority just didn't get it. Even twenty-one years later, *Conquest* remains a hot potato among the Heep flock. The overriding feeling, though, is that it was

distinctly lacklustre. But perhaps more significantly the real problems began to develop onstage, in front of the very eyes and ears of the faithful. Hensley was becoming increasingly frustrated by the way that Sloman would deliver his work.

‘There couldn’t really be any arguments over the new material, after all many of the songs were John’s compositions,’ says Ken now. ‘But when it came to hearing his interpretations of my material, I had a real problem.’

In another interview, Hensley added: ‘John had little going for him vocally. I could understand them wanting to move on, but this was like the difference between Black Sabbath and Gino Vanelli.’

It didn’t take Chris Slade long to realise that he had placed his head into the proverbial lion’s mouth. ‘Would I describe my time in Uriah Heep as good fun?’ He muses. ‘No, not exactly. There was a lot of politics going on. I tried to keep away from the things that were going on between Ken and John, but I was definitely aware of it. Over the years, people have made a lot of claims about what Ken was like to work with – and I can only endorse what they’ve said.’



Album Track-by-Track

Conquest

Released February 1980

Album review by Rodrigo Werneck

Conquest might not have been in the same league as its predecessors, but analysing it now more than twenty years after its release, it is a quite nice album with really strong tunes. At the time, the fans were still waiting for songs in the same old ‘Heepy’ style, but what they got was a wide variety of rock songs and ballads featuring a fresh direction brought by the new members and the stronger involvement of bassist Trevor Bolder with songwriting, contributing – alone or in combination with others – to half of the songs. Sloman’s style, a mix

of Robert Plant's visual and singing approach with Glenn Hughes' funk 'n' soul influences, gave the band its new identity, even if only for an album and a tour. It was later claimed that the tracks marked with an asterisk were actually Sloman compositions which couldn't be credited to him because of existing contractual arrangements although this has never been officially confirmed.

No Return (Bolder/Box/Hensley)

The very beginning of the album already demonstrates a change in the band's style: the intro features Hensley and his new keyboard set up (which eventually generated some interesting instrumental interludes during live performances), along with Sloman's unusual vocals. The harmonies in the chorus and the subsequent guitar solos by Mick Box show that at least some of the idiosyncratic 'Heepy' ingredients were still there. *No Return* combines the rockier side of the band (notably Mick's) and the mellower side (Ken's). It seemed like the band was foreseeing their future, as the lyrics state: 'I'm at the point of no return.'

Imagination (Hensley)

With vocals very much from the Glenn Hughes school, mixing rock and soul/funk, it is easy to see why Hensley wasn't exactly happy with Sloman's performance singing his songs. As Ken has already said, Sloman seemed to follow a difficult path ignoring the obvious when trying to sing these songs. The results were often patchy and unsatisfactory, although sometimes he was spot on. Things came together vocally mainly on the choruses, where Sloman had to act in an ensemble fashion anyway. Despite the vocal limitations, this song showcases lovely bass lines provided by Bolder as well as some really cool band harmonies.

Feelings (Hensley)

This is a typical Hensley song reminiscent from the Lawton-era,

a commercial rocker with catchy guitar riff and chorus. From my personal point of view as a late arriving Heep fan, I can clearly remember this song being broadcast by many radio stations in Brazil in the early-eighties. Radio airplay is always a testament to how strong these melodies are. Sloman's vocals on this song seemed to fit nicely anyway, and together with the traditional Heep harmonies it produced a song that could have been a big hit in other circumstances.

Fools (Bolder)

The first Bolder song to appear on the album features great guitar work by Mick, including a classy guitar solo. Sloman's vocals feel more under control on this one and fit the song's mood better. The ending is just perfect and should work nicely live, including the screams provided by Sloman, imaginative drum parts by Slade, great bass playing by Bolder, and the melody conducted by Box.

Carry On (Hensley)

This is such an unusual song for Heep, even though it was written by Hensley. The keyboards and the vocals sounds much more like if they were on a Queen song, in my opinion, and it was in any way a place for Sloman to shine as it doesn't sound like any other Heep song. I particularly love the keyboard arrangement on this one, with Ken playing his good old Hammond B3 organ together with some of his new synthesisers. The high pitched vocals on the chorus also added a nice touch. This is another song that could have been big.

Won't Have to Wait Too Long (Bolder/Box/Hensley)

Keeping the uplifting spirit of the songs, this one is especially interesting from my perspective as I actually live in Rio de Janeiro. Although the lyrics reflect the usual cliches when Rio is mentioned, as a 'paradise where love is free'. I note these things are always written by people who actually never live there, although I have to admit that the 'sun will always shine' part is quite true. Mick's and Ken's joint

guitar/keyboard parts are of very tasteful on this one. The rhythm section of Bolder and Slade do an outstanding job here, not only keeping themselves in the background but actually adding a lot to the song's atmosphere.

Out On the Street (Hensley)

A change in the album's mood after four really uplifting songs. This was for a long time my favourite on this album, and although this thought changes every time I listen to this album, it's still one of my favourites. I guess the middle heavy instrumental section featuring a lovely duel between Ken's Minimoog and Mick's distorted guitar has a lot to do with it, this is especially neat for a fan of prog rock as myself. Possibly one of the most progressive moments in Heep's history as I recall. Sloman's vocals are more appropriate and less full-on here, and do justice to the thoughtful lyrics.

It Ain't Easy (Bolder)

For years a lot of people thought this song was actually sung by Trevor Bolder, as Sloman's lead vocals on it sound a bit different when compared to the rest of the songs, and also because it is in fact a song credited to Bolder. Listening carefully though, it's easy to spot some very characteristic vocal mannerisms. The main melody played by Ken on one of his synths add a beautiful atmosphere to this song, there is also some nice Fender Rhodes work during the verses. The choir at the end of the song singing together with the synth melody parts is joined by an awesome drum work by Slade, which provides one of the best moments of the album and a fitting end to another chapter in Heep history.



Heep fan Brian Jones had by now become a complete devotee and, as always, he was present among the 3,500 assembled at London's

Hammersmith Odeon to witness the band promoting *Conquest*. Although Jones recalls the performance as 'great', it was not without its more shambolic moments.

'I remember that during *July Morning*, Ken abruptly left the stage,' says Brian. 'After a short pause, he came back and continued as if nothing had happened. Obviously something was wrong, but at the time nobody had no idea what it was.'

The sell out at Hammersmith was a rarity the tour's twenty-three-date UK leg. At most other gigs the fans had chosen to vote with their feet and the thin British attendances only served to heighten the sense of impending failure. It was patently obvious that either Hensley or Sloman would have to go. Given the former's status within the band, Heep fans naturally assumed that the newcomer would be the one to depart – but they were wrong.

The power base in the group had definitely shifted and Ken was unable to muster the necessary support to oust the singer. After a meeting at Gerry Bron's office, Hensley was left with no option but to resign. Mick Box has some candid views on this thorniest of subjects.

'Ken was the best of buddies with most people in the band, but he always had his own thing happening as well,' says the guitarist. 'In those later times, he always found the need to have a personal road manager to sort out his little things. Ken was the sort of person who would create his own team, whereas the rest of us were quite happy just being with each other in a band. At the time of *Conquest*, he insisted on having his own special lighting rig for the solo spot. To be fair, though, he did pay for it himself. But for our part, we had no need of things like that.'

'However, it wasn't a complete breach [of band solidarity]. Ken would still come in and be in part of what we were doing, but only when he wanted to,' Mick elaborates. 'By the time of *Conquest*, he had got his own dressing room, but he would still come into our dressing room to change in the last five minutes! Stuff like that,

none of the rest of us had the desire to do that, we just wanted to be a band. I suppose you could say Ken was a team player when he wanted to be in the team – but certainly not when he didn't want to be.'

With tension of such enormity bubbling away, it was now only a question of time before Hensley quit the band. Italian Heep fan Adriano Stori witnessed one of the final shows that Ken would play with the band, in mid-1980.

'I don't recall the exact set-list, but they opened with *Stealin*' and definitely played *Gypsy*, *Easy Livin'*, *Look at Yourself*, and *July Morning* with Ken on lead vocals, *Suicidal Man*, *Carry On*, *Won't Have to Wait Too long*, *The Wizard*, and *Sweet Lorraine* during the two-and-a-half-hour performance,' says Stori. 'But John Sloman seemed to have problems singing some of the Heep classics, although his performance was rock solid on songs from the *Conquest* album, especially *Feelings*, *Out on the Street* and *No Return*. John also played some electric piano and seemed to be enjoying great success with all the girls present!'

'I have never regretted leaving the band,' professes Hensley of the next sad yet inevitable development. 'I knew all along that it wouldn't last forever, and I definitely wanted to do some other things. I left because I was the only one who could see the damage the arrival of John Sloman was doing. At the time it was only my opinion, but subsequently everybody has agreed with me. By then, of course, it was too late. At the time the others had made it clear that they were united against me.'

Putting his finger on the problem's root, in 1992 Hensley explained: 'When John Sloman joined, the rift really developed because he wrote songs and I think the band saw this as a way of getting away from my style of writing. I guess they saw it as a way of moving the band forward, but in reality it was a step backwards.'

'I wrote simple melodies, but the way John interpreted my songs, as a singer, he changed all the melodies to be so complicated until

the lyrics were unintelligible. That was not Uriah Heep. If we were calling the band Uriah Heep, then we should have at least maintained some allegiance to the traditions of the band.'

He added: 'When Gary [Thain] had died a piece of the puzzle went missing. Although John Wetton was very talented, he didn't fill in the hole that Gary left. From then on it never worked. It continued to sound like Uriah Heep, but it certainly didn't feel like it. I always said that it was like having six people in the band because the five of us were so tight. Nobody cared about royalties or stuff like that. We were just hell bent on playing rock 'n' roll, but things changed after Gary left.'

Hensley's decade-long tenure with Heep had finally come to a sour conclusion, and it seemed as though a new spiritual leader would have to be appointed. Surprisingly, Ken strongly disagrees with this analysis.

'I wasn't the band's leader,' he says with a shake of the head. 'I did write most of the songs and I suppose I did have some very strong opinions on certain issues and how they affected our career, but wouldn't you have expected that? In fact, but my biggest mistake was letting drugs and my ego get the better of me. I know that it had an effect on the other guys and on the band's career and I am very sorry about that. In later years I have tried to apologize to everybody for what happened.'

That included Lee Kerslake, who still felt resentment over his treatment and the way he had left Heep.

'I have tried to reach out to Lee through one of his best friends who lives in St Louis,' Hensley told me in 2001. 'I've also left messages on his answering machine. I'd really love to patch things up with Lee and I'm desperately sorry that he's so resentful towards me. I hope he gets over it some day.'

Hensley insists that he tried not to feel antagonistic towards his former band-mates or Bronze Records – to whom he was still signed as a solo artist – after he had decided to take the leap.



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– Ken Hensley



‘I knew there was a lot of bitterness towards me,’ stated Ken in a 1992 interview. ‘I could sense that by the way Gerry Bron so comprehensively buried my *Free Spirit* solo album. It was a terrible record, but I was trying to fill the hole as quickly as I could, to show the world that I didn’t need Uriah Heep or Gerry Bron and that I could do all this on my own. The record was full of phoney motivation, there were a couple of good songs on it, but overall it was horrible.

‘I was really out to lunch at that time,’ he continued. ‘I didn’t know what to do with myself and I really sensed the bitterness from Gerry. We got into financial disputes, which I didn’t really appreciate. But no, I didn’t particularly feel bitterness towards anybody.’

So Ken returned to his solo career with *Free Spirit* in 1980 (a record that actually featured contributions from Trevor Bolder, Mark Clarke and Denny Ball) and later took employment arranging artist endorsements for a music company. In the early 1980s, he joined Florida-based Southern rockers Blackfoot, appearing on their 1983 album *Siogo* (the title being the American Indian word for friendship) and the following year’s *Vertical Smiles*. There was also the occasional guest appearance, including a spot on W.A.S.P.’s *The Headless Children* album that prompted that band’s mainman Blackie Lawless to comment: ‘Ken Hensley wrote the rule book for heavy metal keyboards as far as I’m concerned.’

Earlier in our story we left Paul Newton somewhat shell-shocked after being sacked from the band. Ironically, Newton now found himself in an ideal position to comment on Ken’s own departure. Despite the earlier antagonism, Paul still had many positive things to say.

‘When Ken Hensley left it was obvious that the band would never be the same,’ Newton observed. ‘I think that Ken lost interest and the trouble was that there was nobody else to take over. In my opinion, unfortunately Ken had become Uriah Heep in many respects, and although we didn’t see eye to eye in the latter days of my

time with the band, I still have the greatest admiration for his work. He's been very under rated for the past twenty years. He should have been hugely successful, but I sometimes think Ken is probably his own worst enemy.'

With arguably the band's most significant line-up change having been completed, Heep had to pick themselves up, dust themselves down and start again for the umpteenth time. John Sloman believed that he knew the ideal replacement for Hensley. Greg Dechert had played with the singer in the aforementioned Pulsar, was a highly accomplished keyboard player and had even been in the solo group of Pink Floyd guitarist Dave Gilmour. Greg was about to be the first Canadian to grace the Heep ranks, and certainly not the last.

Although Dechert was walking into one of the hardest jobs of any new Heep member, he wasn't about to be deterred.

'I felt great about joining Heep. I thought, "I'm in a world famous band". In my past, I'd really liked them, so I felt at ease,' Greg told Canadian writer Kevin Julie. 'I didn't feel haunted at all; I thought, "This is fantastic! Another challenge!" I thought, "I'll get to write some songs and play some big gigs."'

Dechert soon received an alarm call concerning the enormity of his situation when fans – and later the dreaded journalists – began asking difficult questions. As the keyboard player now freely admits, his somewhat conceited answers weren't always what either of these groups of people wanted to hear.

'At the time I'd be asked things like, "How do you feel about replacing the great Ken Hensley?" And I'd just say, "Never mind... the great Greg Dechert is here to take over, and if you don't like it then fuck you!"' He recalls.

'Unfortunately, I don't think the direction that Heep was going in was appreciated by too many people at that point. But then it wasn't a very typical Uriah Heep direction. Some bands grow and move into strange directions – they don't stay with the exactly same style of music. And there are other bands that do stay the same throughout

the years. Some people get really confused when a band starts going in a different direction, even if it's still good music!

'John Sloman was a strong musical director for Heep, and he had ideas to go in a direction that wasn't the typical Uriah Heep style. And I thought that was great! I don't think anybody was terribly unhappy about it, although maybe it wasn't the direction that Mick wanted. There is a Uriah Heep sound and direction and I just don't think it was going that way as much as before. I've played all kinds of music; I think if you're a great musician then you should be able to play anything! Heavy rock or heavy metal isn't necessarily a very technical thing.'

When Hensley had walked out of the door, not surprisingly he had taken his trusty Hammond organ with him.

Dechert: 'I wanted to experiment with an instrument called the CS-80. No one really objected to it at the time. And I don't think that there was even access to a Hammond. I couldn't afford one and nobody said, "Here, we'll supply you with one." Maybe it was the cost of getting one, getting it repaired and ready to go. Had there been a Hammond, I probably would have played one, because it's such a big part of their sound. I think that Mick would have been happier with a Hammond. He even mentioned it, but everyone else seemed happy what was I was doing.'

Although Greg Dechert and John Sloman felt there was still a great deal to be positive about, Ken's departure had raised a number of questions for Mick Box, who had now stepped in to emerge as the de facto leader of the band. As a person, Box has never been a particularly speedy decision maker, preferring to operate by consensus. Some have since interpreted Box's apparent lack of clarity on the fast-disintegrating situation as disinterest. But while various protagonists began to realise that the wheels were falling off, Dechert doesn't believe it was exclusively the fault of the musicians.

'I didn't even think the band were falling apart at the time, but if it was deteriorating then that also had a lot to do with Bronze Records

and Gerry Bron's attitude towards the people in the band in general,' he insists. 'Maybe there were some problems in Gerry's life that led to disinterest for him in the whole business. So it was a struggle for the people working for him and with him to get anywhere with the business of the band.

'When I first joined, the mood had been great,' he continues. 'We went on tour and everybody was happy. But there were a lot of boozing and drugs going on, I think that there had been too many personnel changes. When you start changing people too often it can get to you. Mick had been there a long time, and John Sloman brought in a very strong influence in his writing and his style. It was very different to the original, simpler Uriah Heep style. The original songs were about basic chord changes, very simplistic guitar. And I have nothing against that, there's brilliance in every kind of music. I just think that John's stuff was different.

'For Mick Box there was probably only one Uriah Heep style, and that was hard rock. He lived and breathed that way. Maybe it was just too much of a change from the old style, but it was deteriorating. I know that Chris Slade wasn't happy with the business of it, he felt it was moving too slowly.'

If indeed Gerry Bron was loosening his grip on the band, outside forces had been forcing him to do so. Bronze Records has taken on a roster of other acts including Motörhead, Girlschool, Hawkwind, Osibisa and The Damned, and his non-musical business interests were demanding more and more of his time. In particular, Gerry was beginning to experience difficulties with Executive Express, the business airline that he had built on the back of the spectacular success of both Bronze Records and Uriah Heep.

'Gerry was distant from the band. He made everybody feel distant... it was all very impersonal,' noted Dechert. 'There seemed to have been a deterioration even before I arrived on the scene. I was very green, so I don't think that I myself had an awful lot to do with it. Mick didn't seem to want to play a lot either. I stayed at his place

and I was always trying to get him to write stuff, but it seemed like he always had something else to do. I think he was distracted, or maybe he just wasn't happy with the band as it was. He didn't see it going anywhere, so he didn't put out any energy. Maybe all that had dissipated years before I joined, who knows?

'But I do know that just before I joined, John Sloman hadn't been happy with Ken and Ken wasn't happy with John. And the business end of it was so bad! They had spent a lot of money, and the money wasn't there anymore.'

At this point Heep's business affairs became so perilous that Chris Slade began sounding out other labels for the band to sign to.

'It all began to fall apart. The contract with Bronze Records had expired so I went to Germany and came back with a new one – and it was a very, very good deal,' reveals the drummer. 'Unfortunately, Mick decided to turn it down. It came down to Mick in the end, but he said that Gerry had been like a father to him, and that he would never leave him.'

'About eighteen months later, I saw Mick at Hammersmith Odeon and he told me that if he saw Gerry Bron in the gutter he wouldn't even bother to spit on him. So the difference in that time was staggering. And it was a great shame because I went to a great deal of personal expense to get that deal, and it could have represented a whole new start for the band.'

'Sloman and Trevor had written the demos that we gave to the guy from the label, and he was so impressed that he said, "These are the best demos I've ever heard in my life". Those tapes are still sitting around, although they did re-do *Think It Over*, although it was never as good as the demo.'

Tougher times were indeed just round the corner, and with the clarity that sometimes only a new face can bring, Dechert had seen the warning signs from as long ago as the recording of the sessions that propagated the *Think It Over* single. According to the Canadian, although there had been plenty of preparation before entering

the studio, genuine ideas and inspiration were both rather less conspicuous.

‘Trevor and John had written a lot of material, and I wrote one tune completely called *I Never Want to Live Without Your Love*. It did get recorded, but was never mixed. I doubt very much that they’ll ever release it if Mick has anything to do with it. Some of the stuff was pretty neat, but again I don’t think it’ll ever be released if Mick or Trev have anything to do with it because neither of them truly believed in it. I guess I’ll never know why it all fell apart. There were probably a lot of things going on that I didn’t know about.’

In spite of all the immense problems, or possibly as an attempt at sweeping them under the metaphorical table, Heep set out on yet another UK tour, this time taking in smaller venues and universities. Slade recalls there being some enjoyable moments from this era.

‘There were definitely some good times, and I remember being with Greg in a hotel on one memorable occasion,’ smiles the drummer. ‘There was this big, big cake – almost like a wedding cake – and he looked at it and said, “Aaaaah, I’d love to put my face into that.” So he bought it and smashed his face into it. Actually, he was hesitating a bit, so we all made him dive in! He was covered in bits of meringue right up to the top of his head... thinking about it, it probably didn’t do his hair any good.’

Cake-diving episodes aside, Dechert’s final few months with Uriah Heep were generally distinctly unhappy ones.

‘There was unrest and unhappiness from everybody in the band,’ he states. ‘It was a little bit of everything, really; musically, personally, and financially, plus what was going on with Bronze Records. There was enough going wrong in every department to make it impossible for us to stay together.’

‘I was disappointed in the sense that it was one of the first big projects I’d been involved in, and I thought, “Jeez, is every project going to be like this?” Having said that, part of me was glad it was over because of all the unrest. The best memories are from just

playing with all those guys. They were all great musicians. There were also a lot of laughs and good jokes! Overall I don't really have any bad memories. My only regret is that it ended so quickly, and of feeling confused and uncertain, and not being told about everything that was going on. It just seemed like everyone was tired of it.'

Greg had indeed read the signs correctly, and John Sloman announced he was leaving the sinking ship, offering the departing statement: 'Whilst I have enjoyed the past eighteen months with Heep, I feel that my musical ambitions lie in a different direction.' When he was offered the opportunity of contributing to this book, Sloman politely declined to do so. The singer played for a while with ex-Thin Lizzy guitarist Gary Moore and went on to release a 1989 solo album, *Disappearances Can Be Deceptive*, that also featured the talents of Dechert. In 2001, he also played a rare show opening for the British group Mostly Autumn and is now reportedly working on a new album for Classic Rock Productions.

Slade, too, had come to the conclusion that he'd had enough. Frustrated that the band had not chosen to accept the new record deal he had found for them and bored with all the back-biting, he also threw in the towel. He eventually went on to play with AC/DC and to join Jimmy Page and Paul Rodgers in The Firm. These days, as recounted earlier, Chris is a member of Asia.

'My disillusionment about the record deal that I'd got for them was partly behind why I left,' he explains. 'But Ken had left by then, of course, and one day Trevor rang me and said that he and Mick were just gonna start all over again. There was no record deal at that point, and nothing whatsoever happening for them. I just said, "Sure."

'I still speak to John Sloman,' he adds. 'We're very good friends and speak a lot whenever we can be bothered to pick up the phone. [Laughs] He's got a studio at his home and he writes and demos there – and he's still doing some great stuff. But John's the only one that I've really kept in touch with over the years.'

The band's heartbeat was slowly dying, and it was Box who finally took the decision to unplug the life support machine.

'We'd recorded about half of the follow-up to *Conquest* when I finally decided that the time had come to knock it on the head,' he explains with rare sadness. 'We took a forced break, just by virtue of the fact that our studio time had run out. So I went back to the States, where my missus was. I sat down and I just thought and thought. It was about three weeks before I'd managed to weigh everything up. It was problem that everything was so diverse. All five heads had been going in completely different directions, and it was all becoming a bit of a shambles.

'So I came back to England, phoned all the members and told them, "Look, I think we should call it a day, this just isn't working anymore." Things had been steadily going sour for many years, and the *Conquest* line-up had really brought matters to a head. It was a bunch of talented musicians, but it just didn't make a band. Frankly, it was a total disaster.

'There were no real hassles from anyone,' he adds, 'everyone kind of agreed with me right across the board.'



This new development dealt a huge blow to the band and brought that chapter of the Heep saga to a close. Fortunately every ending brings a new beginning, and Heep weren't finished just yet. They had still had a rollercoaster journey to come. One that saw them both at their lowest and at their most triumphant. Read on in the next *Music Legends Uriah Heep Special Edition*.



Uriah Heep

Firefly to Conquest

**MUSIC
LEGENDS**